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ABSTRACT

Foreign language instructors cope with problems of learner anxiety in the classroom, fossilization of language use and language skill loss. Relaxation and concentration techniques can alleviate stress and fatigue and improve students' capabilities. Three categories of accelerated learning techniques are: (1) those that serve as a preliminary to learning; (2) those that work in regular language classes, and (3) those that apply to home study. Learning preliminaries include: physical and mental relaxation exercises; breathing exercises; outer and inner concentration exercises; the Sophrology memory training system; and adaptation of the original session in Suggestopedia. Accelerated learning techniques for use in class comprise reading the lesson text in a dramatic manner and using yogic intonations for the new words in the text; the use of inner speech and outer concentration during the activity session; a second reading of the text over baroque slow movements; and the coordination of the oral presentation of the text with slides or videotapes and slow-moving music. Activities for home study include: listening to relaxation tapes; listening to specially prepared vocabulary tapes; and reading over the texts studied in class while listening to tapes of these texts being presented over baroque slow movements. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/CK)

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Accelerated Learning Techniques for the Foreign Language Class: A Personal View

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Abstract

Today's foreign language instructor has to confront very real problems of learner anxiety in the classroom, fossilization of language use and language skill loss. It would appear that a large number of our students are suffering from stress, fatigue and poor concentration and are unable to learn and/or memorize effectively.

Relaxation and concentration techniques (such as those which were originally a part of Suggestopedia) can greatly alleviate stress and fatigue and improve students' confidence, concentration and memorization capabilities.

In the opinion of the author, accelerated learning techniques may be divided into three categories: 1) those which serve as a preliminary to learning (and which can be taught in a special training period before classes begin); 2) those which apply specifically to the learning of a foreign language and which can be used in regular language classes; 3) those which apply to home study.

Learning preliminaries include: 1) physical and mental relaxation exercises; 2) breathing exercises; 3) outer and inner concentration (or visualization) exercises; 4) the Sophrology memory training system; 5) an adaptation of the original session in Suggestopedia.

In addition to relaxation and visualization exercises, TPR strategies, choral chanting, role-playing, singing and games, accelerated learning techniques for use in class comprise: reading the lesson text in a dramatic manner and using three yogic intonations for the new words in the text; the use of inner speech and outer concentration by the students during the "active" session; a second reading of the text over baroque slow movements while the students breathe slowly and deeply and visualize the "scene" inwardly; the coordination of the oral presentation of the text with slides or videotapes and slow-moving music.

Accelerated learning activities for home study include: listening to relaxation tapes; listening to specially prepared vocabulary tapes; reading over the texts studied in class while listening to tapes of these texts being presented over baroque slow movements.

The techniques described are all ones the author has personally found effective in class and/or in special memory training sessions with students.

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Accelerated Learning Techniques for the Foreign Language Class: A Personal View

W. Jane Bancroft

Like many instructors in today's colleges and universities, I am greatly concerned about student stress, fatigue and lack of concentration - in and out of the classroom. As someone who was trained in French literature but who is more and more frequently called upon to teach French as a second language, I am also concerned about learner anxiety in the classroom, language skill loss and fossilization of language use, especially as these problems have a negative effect on enrolment . While I do not necessarily give enthusiastic endorsement to the belief that each and every student possesses vast unconscious reserves which, if properly tapped by a competent, personable instructor, will make of him or her a brilliant language student, I do believe that relaxation and concentration techniques (such as those which were originally a part of Suggestopedia) can greatly alleviate stress and fatigue and improve students' confidence, concentration and memorization abilities, as well as their capacities to express themselves in the foreign (or second) language.

Accelerated learning techniques may be divided, I believe, into three categories:

I) those which serve as a preliminary to learning (and which can be taught in a special training period before classes begin);

2) those which apply specifically to the learning of a foreign language and which can be used in regular language classes by teacher and students;

3) those which apply to home study and which can be used by the students following the class.

Needless to say (and as we shall see), there is some overlap insofar as elements of these three categories are concerned.

a) Learning Preliminaries

In a workshop format of several hours (or four days if gradated exercises are used), I use the following sequence for stress-management and memory training outside of class or before classes begin: 1) physical and mental relaxation (or mind-calming) exercises and SALT "early pleasant learning recall"; 2) breathing exercises (including coordination of breathing with mental and physical activity; 3) outer and inner concentration (or visualization) exercises. (While exercises in [1] are largely taken from Schuster's SALT, [1] exercises in [2] and [3] are taken from Jacques de Coulon's Méthode Arc-en-Ciel). [2]

Following the preliminary exercises, I concentrate on two memory-training systems: 1) the Sophrology memory training system (as elaborated by Dr. Alfonso Caycedo and Dr. Yves Davrou); [3] 2) the original version of the suggestopedic séance or session as developed by Aleko Novakov at the Institute of Suggestology in the late 1960's and early 1970's. [4] The Sophrology memory training system is designed to improve the memory in a global sense and is what one might call "inner-directed." The original session in Suggestopedia is ideally suited for stress-free rote memorization of basic factual materials (for example, language vocabulary); indeed, its basic elements remind one of memorizing Latin vocabulary in two parallel columns in the "old days" of rote learning - but without the accompanying fatigue. The memory training sessions of both Sophrology and Suggestopedia are based on learning in two complementary states of consciousness: a wide-awake, alert level (outer concentration) and a deeper, more relaxed level (inner concentration or meditation). Whereas Suggestopedia (in its original version) uses a background of soft, soothing baroque music during the "passive" session, Sophrology does not make use of music as an aid to memorization.

i) Physical and Mental Relaxation

Experts recommend that physical relaxation should precede mental relaxation which, in turn, should precede concentration exercises. (The Chinese know this and, in the People's Republic of China, students are put through 20 minutes of special exercises every morning before classes begin, and every three to four hours thereafter. Meanwhile, in North America, sports programs are either being phased out or else favor the super-athletic; the general level of fitness in our students is said to be very low). In the many memory training sessions I have conducted over the years, I tend to "borrow" physical exercises from a number of sources (as well as from the SALT teacher's manual): commercial programs in stress-management (such as those offered by Eli Bay at the Relaxation Response in Toronto); Chinese books on fitness for the martial arts; Sophrology; RYE (the Paris-based, government-sponsored Research into Yoga in Education). Sample physical exercises include: stretching exercises; jumping on a "hot" spot; distension breathing; shaking out the tension in the arms and legs. Exercises used depend on the space available in the room; the number of students and their proximity to one another; student level of physical and psychological tension; time available for this portion of the "training." Neck rolls and the progressive relaxation exercise (in which the key areas of the body from feet to head are relaxed in turn) are performed while the students are seated comfortably but with a good posture (feet planted on the floor and hands resting lightly on their thighs) in their chairs. During the progressive relaxation exercise, which I direct, students are also asked to pay attention to their breathing - not in the sense of a precise count but in the sense of making it slow and deep.

Mind-calming exercises comprise "seeing" a little white cloud moving in the sky on

a warm summer's day or climbing an imaginary mountain to watch a beautiful sunrise. (These exercises are taken from the SALT teacher's manual). A SALT exercise of "early pleasant learning recall," in which the students are encouraged to return to a past childhood situation where learning was pleasurable, not only induces a state of mental relaxation but also improves student motivation. In contrast to certain prominent SALT practitioners, I prefer to read the mind-calming and early pleasant learning recall exercises (as well as the progressive relaxation exercise) over a background of slow movements from baroque chamber music; what generally happens is that the students' breathing rhythm slows down naturally. [5] I have found the music tapes produced by Superlearning Inc. to be very effective; another tape the students enjoy is the Pachelbel Canon in D Major performed on synthesizers and reset against the soothing sound of the ebb and flow of the sea.

ii) Breathing Exercises

It is very important for students to be in a well-ventilated classroom (something that is not always the case, unfortunately, in our "energy-efficient" modern buildings). It is also important for them to be seated in an erect posture and to be breathing properly if concentration and learning are to occur. Books on Yoga may be consulted for breathing techniques but the main points to mention are: breathing through the nose; breathing slowly and deeply from the abdomen; and breathing in a rhythmic manner, by harmonizing the three "moments" of inhalation, retention of the inhaled air and exhalation. Sample breathing exercises include having the students 1) concentrate on their breathing for 30 seconds, visualizing the air inside them; 2) check their pulse beat and make their breathing rhythm coincide with their heart rate; 3) count the number of breaths they take within one minute. The next step is to coordinate

breathing with mental and physical activity. Physical activities might include synchronizing breathing with four separate movements: get up, raise your arm, sit down, pick up a pencil; inhale while executing the first two movements, pause and hold breath, exhale while performing the last two movements. Mental activities could comprise reading a text while counting the number of breaths one takes; coordinating breathing rhythm with pulse rate and at the same time reading a paragraph from a book; copying down several lines from a book or article while breathing slowly and deeply. (All of these activities can be found in Jacques de Coulon's book, Eveil et Harmonie de la Personnalité; the different categories of exercises are presented in series, according to their level of difficulty).

Another useful set of preliminary exercises involves the harmonization of breathing with outward concentration. For example, on a wavy line marked as follows:

students may be asked to breathe in from left to right and then to breathe out from right to left, while their gaze moves slowly from point to point along the line. The teacher may design on the blackboard (or white board) two figures linked by a vertical line of about one meter in length:

The students are asked to exhale, look at the lower drawing and inhale slowly while moving their gaze up the line, point by point. When the upper design is reached, the students look at it, hold their breath and then commence a slow exhalation while moving their glance back down the line, point by point, until the lower design has been reached. After a several seconds' pause, the exercise begins again. (Students can move their heads or their eyes alone during this exercise).

iii) Outer and Inner Concentration Exercises

Concentration exercises begin with fixing one's outward attention on geometric shapes or patterns, reminiscent of the mandala. For example, in the following design:

students are asked to concentrate on the small dot situated in the center of the figure at the right (30 seconds). Then they are asked to transfer their gaze to the dot at the left of the design. If the students have concentrated properly on the design - and I have encountered students who are incapable of concentrating for 30 seconds - they should see, on the left, the same figure as on the right, except that the colors are reversed. (This exercise can be used "in black on white," but, in my opinion, it works better with a colored circle).

Another sample exercise taken from the Jacques de Coulon book involves both outer and inner concentration:

The students are asked to concentrate on the black circle and then to try to project a cross onto the inside of it, cutting through the dot. Then they are asked to close their eyes and to visualize the same geometric shape - a circle with a dot inside it and a cross projected on the circle - and to fix their inner attention on this design.

An exercise which involves inner and outer concentration, on the one hand, and a "life-affirming" or motivating factor, on the other (at least for students of French!), is the following:

The students are given the following instructions: Concentrate your outward attention on the word VIE (= LIFE) for one minute. Now close your eyes and relax your eyelids. Imagine a white screen on which the word VIE is printed in black. Let the word disappear. With your eyes closed, recreate a white screen. Project the word VIE in black on this screen. Visualize clearly the separate letters. Keep this word in your mind's eye as long as possible.

A sample visualization (or inner concentration) exercise involves having the students choose two mental images, say, two different (and differently colored) objects or two different geometric shapes (a blue circle, a green square, for example). The students are asked to close their eyes, relax their eyelids and breathe slowly and deeply from the abdomen. As the students breathe in, they are asked to visualize

clearly one of the two images., As they hold their breath, they visualize this inner image. While breathing out, they clearly visualize the second image, as if they were "changing slides." During a pause between breaths, they continue to visualize the second image. Next they breathe in and clearly visualize the first image once again, as the exercise is repeated.

In addition to exercises to develop visual concentration, exercises may also be used to develop auditory concentration. For example, the students are asked to close their eyes and to concentrate on the objects the teacher mentions, visualizing each one in turn. Then the students open their eyes and are asked to recite, or write down the objects named and in the proper order. I tell students that for effective learning to occur in an academic setting, it is very important to develop auditory, as well as visual concentration.

Once the students have performed the preliminary exercises of relaxation, breathing and concentration, they are ready to become acquainted with the Sophrology memory training system and with the original session in Suggestopedia, two systems which, as previously mentioned, involve learning in two complementary states of consciousness: outer concentration on the text and inner visualization of the text.

iv) Sophrology Memory Training System

Developed originally for personal or therapeutic situations, the Caycedo system for memory training can also be used for exam preparation as well as for memorization either of the main ideas (of an article or book chapter, for example) or the precise words of what one has just read (or is in the act of reading). For exam preparation, students are trained in rhythmic, abdominal breathing, coordination of breathing with

thought or image, proper cerebral circulation, correct posture(s) and visualizations of themselves performing well, and in a stress-free state, at exam time. Insofar as studying printed materials is concerned, the students are first directed to look at the material (a language dialogue or a book chapter, for example) with intense concentration and in an upright seated posture. Then they are asked to close their eyes and, in an inclined seated posture, to visualize, according to the material being studied, either the main points or the precise words of what they have just read. (This visualization takes the form of projecting either the main points or the precise words on an inner mental screen). Then the students are asked to open their eyes and to write down on paper or present orally what they have remembered. They may reread the material in question to see if it has been fully "registered." In contrast to Suggestopedia, no music is used in Sophrology and the students can move at their own pace. (For home use, I tell the students to focus themselves by listening to Mozart - instead of to rock music - before studying and to continue training themselves in the Sophrology memory enhancement system until they can move at a fairly rapid pace).

v) The Original Suggestopedic Session

In the "preliminaries" section, the suggestopedic session is utilized for training in the memorization of basic factual materials (for example, foreign language vocabulary). Students are trained to memorize sample vocabulary lists which are presented to them on sheets of paper or on overhead transparencies; the foreign language (or part to be memorized) is on the left side of the page (or transparency) while the native language equivalent (or cue) is on the right side. Students are told to read over the list of paired associates before the exercise commences.

The listed of paired associates is then read twice by the teacher. During the first

reading, the teacher presents each foreign-language word (or item to be memorized) with three different (yogic) intonations: declarative, whisper, loud command. (The native-language equivalent, or cue, is read before the foreign language item - but always in a monotone). The material is read on an eight second cycle: two seconds - translation (or cue); four seconds - foreign language word (or item); two seconds - pause. (To maintain the rhythm, I find it useful to tap my foot lightly on the floor). During the "active" session, the students are told to concentrate their outward attention on the text and to repeat to themselves (using inner speech) the appropriate foreign-language words (or items) as the teacher reads them.

During the "passive" session, the teacher reads the same paired associates a second time but now in a soft, soothing and persuasive voice over a background of slow movements from baroque chamber music. (According to experts on Yoga, the "ideal" positioning of the voice can be achieved by breathing slowly and rhythmically and by putting oneself, through autosuggestion, into a state of relaxation). Ideally the movements should be in 2/4 or 4/4 time and with a metronome speed of 60 to the minute (or one beat per second) so that the 2/4/2 rhythm of cue, item-to-be-memorized and pause can be coordinated with the music. (For demonstration purposes, I frequently use the Superlearning music tapes, already referred to in the physical and mental relaxation section). The students have already been trained to breathe to a musical beat during the progressive relaxation exercise; however, they are told not to pay direct attention to their breathing rhythm during the concert session as their breathing will naturally slow down in response to the baroque slow movements. With eyes closed and in a relaxed posture, they listen to the music and visualize (or concentrate inwardly on) the text.

b) Accelerated Learning Techniques for Use in Class

In the classroom, the language instructor has access to a wide range of "memory training" strategies: repetition and drill, choral chanting, role-playing, story-telling, singing, games, relevant and emotionally appealing dialogues. As has been shown by Lozanov, Rosenthal, Schuster and Dhority, among others, the teacher himself (or herself) has an effect on learning - hopefully, a positive one. So, too, does the environment, as Lozanov has demonstrated in Suggestopedia and Dhority in the ACT Approach. So-called "right-brain" activities such as music and visualization exercises, as well as physical activities of a type used in Total Physical Response, can be used to improve language learning and retention. Multi-sensory inputs (auditory, visual, motor), considered so important for improved memorization by those with a knowledge of brain functioning, can also (and should) be a part of the language classroom. [6]

Some very effective memory training elements which can be used in the classroom relate to Yoga: outer/inner concentration; the three intonations of the original suggestopedic active session; the Savasana pose (during the concert session); deep, rhythmic breathing; visualization of the pleasant (or "ideal") scene described in the lesson dialogue; a slow-moving musical beat of 60 to the minute (the ideal meditation rhythm in Indian music); an "ideal" twenty-minute session; coordination of breathing with concentration and music rhythm; mind/body harmony; a state of relaxed alertness to promote unconscious assimilation of materials. I have found that it is possible to use some, but not all of these elements that were originally a part of Suggestopedia in the "conventional" language classroom. (It is very difficult, for example, to have twenty-minute presentation sessions in an hour-long class and suitable chairs are not always available for the correct execution of the alternate Savasana posture of rest and relaxation).

It is generally possible to utilize a "mini-session," if not necessarily in every fifty-minute class, then at least twice a week. [7] When reading the lesson text (a short dialogue or narrative passage in a beginning course), I read it in a dramatic way, i.e., by using as many voice levels as possible. I do not read the dialogue over classical or romantic music as in Suggestopedia 2 because my students find such music too distracting; moreover, except in an intensive-course format, the first concert of the second version of Suggestopedia is too long. Nor do I read entire sentences or phrases using the three intonations of the original active session as students find this procedure too artificial. However, when reading the dialogue or narrative passage, I repeat new and/or difficult words and expressions with three intonations or voice levels. During the first reading of the lesson material, students are asked to watch their texts attentively and to use inner speech or silent repetition throughout. (The first presentation [as well as the second] may also be used for grammar items - provided these are reworked into a "poetic" or "narrative" framework, following the example of my former colleague, Christine Besnard who is now at Glendon College in Toronto. In addition, the first reading may be coordinated with a slide presentation [or videotape] of the scenes or situations involved; in this case the students watch the screen [or the subtitles on the screen] while using inner speech). [8]

For the passive session, the teacher reads the lesson-text a second time, in a soft and soothing voice over a background of one or more baroque slow movements. (The number of slow movements used depends on the length of the dialogue or narrative passage). In addition to using the Superlearning music tapes, I have had my own tapes made by the technicians at the Scarborough Campus of the University of Toronto; the precise length of each excerpt is marked on the cassette so that I can select the appropriate movement(s) for a given dialogue. [9] During this second

reading, I use no special rhythmic pattern; the reading constitutes a kind of recitative over the music, with pauses of 2 - 4 seconds between word groups or sentences and a coordination of these pauses with the end of a musical phrase. Before the second reading begins, students are asked to close their eyes, breathe deeply and slowly from the abdomen, sit in a relaxed posture and listen to the music. While the material is being presented, they may visualize the "scene" inwardly. To bring the students out of their deeply relaxed state, I use a short allegro movement from baroque music or I gradually count them "back to the surface," ask them to open their eyes and execute gentle stretching movements.

c) Home Study using "Accelerated Learning"

For home use, in addition to a relaxation tape, students have access to tapes of baroque and classical music (Mozart, for example) which are ideal for focusing attention and relaxing the mind. It is a good idea if they also have access to tapes of the vocabulary items for each lesson, recorded over a background of baroque slow movements by a native speaker in the original suggestopedic rhythm of 2/4/2 (i.e., two seconds English translation, four seconds foreign-language word group, two seconds pause). As in the Dhority ACT Approach, students should be encouraged to read over the texts studied in class just before going to sleep while listening to a tape of the presentation of the material over baroque slow movements. (As Tomatis, for example, has shown, a very effective technique for learning foreign languages is the combination of audio and visual elements).[10]

In conclusion, I believe that, in an era when student concentration is in such need of improvement and memorization of vocabulary and verb forms is not what it used to be, the yogic memory-training elements of the original suggestopedic session should be

incorporated, wherever possible, into the language class along with such other elements of communicative-based or language-acquisition approaches as TPR strategies, role-playing, singing and games. Students should also be encouraged to use memory-training strategies at home in order to alleviate the stress and fatigue of studying and to improve memorization of "the basics" - so essential if one is to progress in foreign (or second) language study.

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Notes

[1]See Donald Schuster and Charles Gritton, Suggestive-Accelerative Learning Techniques (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1986), pp. 109 ff.

[2]See Jacques de Coulon, Eveil et Harmonie de la Personnalité: Culture Physique et Psychique par la Méthode Arc-en-Ciel (Lausanne: Au Signal, 1977).

[3]See my article, "Caycedo's Sophrology and Lozanov's Suggestology: Mirror Images of a System," ERIC Documents on Foreign Language Teaching and Linguistics, 1979. 20 pp. in microfiche. ED 183 033. See also Yves Davrou and Françoise Leclerq, Les Etonnantes Possibilités de votre Mémoire par la Sophrologie (Paris: Editions Retz, 1982).

[4]See my article, "The Lozanov Language Class," ERIC Documents on Foreign Language Teaching and Linguistics, 1975. 53 pp. in microfiche. ED 108 475.

[5]Lynn Dhority has also found that, during the reading or presentation of guided fantasies the "students' breathing will tend to synchronize to the rhythmical delivery" (The ACT Approach [New York: Gordon and Breach, 1992], p. 66).

[6]Schuster and Gritton, Suggestive-Accelerative Learning Techniques, pp. 80-81.

[7]See my article, "Suggestopedia, Sophrology and the Traditional Foreign Language Class," (Foreign Language Annals, 15 [1982], 373-79), which describes the use of these techniques to teach beginning French at the Scarborough Campus of the University of Toronto in the late 1970's and early 1980's.

[8]See Besnard's article, "Techniques de concentration et de mémorisation dans la classe de langue seconde," Contact, 4 (1985), 8 - 10. For vocabulary related to

nature, weather and the seasons (vocabulary that is presented in a conventional textbook), Besnard uses a specially written scenario, coordinates the oral presentation with a "slide show" and uses, as background, music composed by André Gagnon - Mes quatre saisons, for example. As a number of us have found in Canada, it is not always necessary to write one's own textbook; suggestopedic or accelerated learning techniques can be used with a conventional, even a traditional textbook as well as with supplementary materials written to accompany it. It is also possible to use slow-moving "modern" music for the concert presentation and to combine elements of the original "active" session in Suggestopedia with the music of the "passive" session. (See, in this regard, Sigrid Gassner-Roberts, "Suggestopedic Research in the GDR: A Personal Report," Journal of the Society for Accelerative Learning and Teaching, 11 [1986], 115-21. In the former German Democratic Republic, the three intonations of the "active" session were combined with the music of the "passive" session).

[9]The original Suggestopedic session, as devised by Aleko Novakov, used the same "ritualistic" music for each concert session. North American students generally find a repetition of the same music, day in and day out, extremely boring. The teacher, therefore, should use a variety of baroque slow movements for the "concert." In addition to using such well-known pieces as the Largo from Handel's Xerxes, the Air and Andante from The Water Music Suite and the Air from Bach's Suite No. 3 in D Major, slow movements (usually marked largo, larghetto, andante and adagio) may be excerpted from the following: Bach Brandenburg Concerti No. 1, No. 5, No. 6; Bach Violin Concerto in E Major; Corelli Concerti Grossi Op. 6; Corelli Trio Sonatas Op. 4; Handel Concerti Grossi Op. 6, No.7, No. 9, No. 12; Telemann Concerto in G Major for Viola and Strings; Telemann Concerto in F Major for Three Violins and Strings; Vivaldi's The Trial of Harmony and Invention, Op. 8; Vivaldi Violin Concerti for Two Violins and Orchestra in D Minor, C Minor, G Minor and D Major; Vivaldi Concerto in D Major for Guitar and Strings.

[10]Léna Tomatis, L'Intégration des Langues Vivantes (Paris: Editions Soditap, 1970), p. 32.